

Natural Disaster Must Not Become Financial Disaster

By Congressman Jerry Moran

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Our nation finds itself at a crossroads following the unprecedented devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Thousands of lives have been affected, and thousands more have sacrificed and opened their hearts to relieve the suffering of victims. While Americans have given much, Congress has been slow to learn that being good stewards of the taxpayer dollar also requires a little sacrifice. Congress has provided a much needed \$65 billion in disaster relief - a record level in our nation's history - but has yet to tighten its belt to reduce spending in non-critical areas in order to pay for this necessary aid. Instead, Congress appears poised to pass on the burden of record deficits to future generations. As more aid is needed in the coming weeks and months, we must ensure this natural disaster does not become a financial disaster for our country.

The magnitude of rebuilding the Gulf Coast region requires Congress to make sacrifices, even if they fall close to home. I am calling on my colleagues to adopt a one-year moratorium on all 2006 legislative earmarks. Last year, members secured nearly 14,000 special projects, totaling \$27 billion. Delaying these projects for one year is a reasonable sacrifice Members of Congress can make. I have also sponsored legislation to postpone for two years the prescription drug benefit, except for seniors with the highest financial need. This delay of the full implementation will save taxpayers billions of dollars. In this time of overstretched budgets, our country cannot

afford this expensive program.

Now more than ever, it is time for Congress to get serious about exercising fiscal responsibility. As critical resources are provided for recovering and rebuilding the Gulf Coast communities, it is important proper controls are put in place to ensure taxpayer money is spent wisely and reaches those who truly need it. There is also much room to reform the federal budget process in ways that eliminate wasteful, unnecessary and inappropriate spending. I am pleased to support legislation led by Kansas delegation members Senator Sam Brownback and Congressman Todd Tiahrt that establishes a commission to independently review federal programs in order to eliminate those which are outdated, irrelevant or inefficient. I am also supporting a Constitutional amendment to require the federal government to balance its budget. Almost every state, including Kansas, is required to balance its books by year's end, just as you and I do with our budgets at home.

The time for fiscal discipline and accountability is long overdue in our nation's capital. As we reach this crossroads, the decisions of Congress will affect generations to come. I have no doubt that Americans will come together and recover from the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina. Members of Congress must now step up and work together to ensure the financial future of America does not become another victim of this disaster.